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Mattie Edwards Hewitt

A CHINCHILLA CLOAK

Wraps in the History of Costume

BY JANET DUER

WHILE society may lay down a rule that the higher the standing of a civilized individual the more frequently does he change his clothes, the custom of wearing an outer garment by all people in all elements of society has been made universal, through climatic necessity, if not from traditional use. The modern wrap, therefore, is but the glorification of the shawl, the cape, the cloak or mantle of former times, and of the skins of animals of even an earlier period—all used for the same purpose throughout the history of man—protection and warmth. In view of this it is interesting to note the evolution of the present day coat or wrap and to see how logically and how easily it gradually became the graceful and comfortable outer garment it now is.

Turning to the age of primitive man, the skins of animals were utilized not only as a covering to provide warmth—but to afford a certain protection to the body, for the aborigine was, perforce, a hunter, and as such, subjected to bodily dangers. Then as the knowledge of weaving introduced the utilization of vegetable fibre, crudely woven strips of material soon took the form of the shawl and by using two shawls, up to the armpits and fastening the ends together over the shoulder, the tunic was evolved. Sleeves were then formed by adding a third shawl, fitted and shaped to the arm. When the front of the garment was sewn up or left open only a short distance in the centre near the neck, it became a tunic, and when open the entire length of the front, a coat.

Having an outline such as this, as a basis, the variation of trimming and elaboration soon became a feature of the passing fashion, each era bringing its

demand for certain materials, colors and styles. Among primitive people, such as the races that inhabit countries where the climate does not demand clothing for warmth, it is not worn as it is in the civilized world, because of its ornamental character—real or supposed—or to satisfy civilized ideas of modesty. Generally speaking, the more simple the race the greater the love of ornament and it is in the wearing of numerous necklaces, earrings, bracelets, amulets, anklets and other jewelry of this character that primitive interest lies rather than in clothing that either would protect or ornament their bodies. To illustrate what little heed is given to the subject of warm clothing for protection from the elements, consider for instance the natives of Tierra del Fuego, who wear only a square of otter skin, about the size of a handkerchief, which is laced across the breast by strings and can be shifted from side to side, according to the direction of the wind. The ornament of barbaric people, however, is of importance, as the distinguishing mark of rank or social status of both men and women.

During the early Christian era the cloak or cape expressed the flowing lines of all dress and was the accepted outer garment. In the Sixth century these took on the character of vestments in ecclesiastical use, being held together with jeweled clasps or with brooches at the throat. Others were worn with one end of the cloak draped over the opposite shoulder. As the centuries advanced, the cloak became the "grand garment" and was heavily banded with ornament. Veil draperies also often took the place of the more elaborate cloak during this period.

In the Eighteenth century, the jacket,



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG ROMAN MATRON. BY SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO

made long over the hips and fitted to the figure, was dictated by the trend of fashion in costume. This jacket form of garment was fur-trimmed, chiefly with ermine heavily embroidered and ornamented with jewels. The jacket reappeared as late as the Fifteenth century and with it the high collar rather than the earlier square cut or round neck. Later in the Seventeenth century the ruff and collar found their most elaborate expression in Elizabeth's time, as did the entire wardrobe of those at court, raiment which vied with that of the rest of Europe in the splendor and extravagance of embroidered and jewelled stuffs.

In the Eighteenth century, capes with hoods found favor, as the headdresses of the period would not readily admit of wearing hats, and great full cloaks were worn to cover the paniers and quilted satin petticoats of the mode. Light gauze scarfs were carried and the silks and satins of gowns and cloaks had much gold, silver and colored silk needlework.

About 1835 heavy mantles, capes and

pelisses appeared, much braided and trimmed with fringe. Then came the return of the V-shaped shawl with its fringed edges, a survival of an accidental occurrence in weaving, when, in the early looms, the threads of the warp were left hanging. While the shawl was the simplest and earliest of wraps, its popularity was not to be diminished by the changing fashions in Great Britain, for it became the national garment of Ireland and Wales and in Scotland was the forerunner of the characteristic Scotch mantle.

Throughout the Victorian reign, India and Paisley shawls continued to be worn, then followed the vogue for mantles of a cumbersome type, short silk capes with long, fringe-trimmed pointed fronts, and later, in the '60's, the close fitting short coat and the Zouave jacket.

After the passing of some fifty years, during which women's wraps conformed in character to the width of skirt and size of the sleeves of the gown worn beneath them, the modern wrap has developed into a becoming and voluminous garment, invariably fur trimmed, with a soft rolling collar that envelops the throat, and constitutes the dominating feature of the entire garment. That the fur may yield itself more readily to the outline of the throat and head, it is often sewn in narrow strips on chiffon, having the effect of a single pelt and yet the pliability of a soft, light weight material. Be it for summer or winter wear fur is the undeniable preference in trimming for wraps for evening wear, which may have as their foundation material, metal brocade of satin or velvet, or a one-toned velvet of some rich coloring. Chinchilla, sable, ermine and the fox furs are among those most used.

In the matter of day-time wear we have, indeed, turned to primitive dress in the acceptance of leather as a material for motor coats and in the use of fur for an entire outer garment. We have learned, like our predecessors that these textures, and these only can withstand the biting winter winds of northern countries.



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